

O Dark Dark Dark Amid The Blaze Of Noon

This unforgettable line is the anguished cry of the newly-blinded hero in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. Milton himself went blind towards the end of his life, and this affliction gives his poem a unique and plangent power.

The Five Senses

Everything I know comes to me through my five senses. I can get very pompous and high-minded about my glorious mental gifts and my spiritual experience; but if I forget that none of it works without those humble five senses through which I have perception, I've lost touch with the truth. And what are my senses like? I play Chinese Whispers, and produce a garbled mess of nonsense out of a well-known phrase or saying. I swear I saw a signpost on a journey, or an old friend, or a news item in the paper, and then discover it can't be true. I insist that someone said something they later stoutly deny. The truth is that I have a way of filling in the truth from my own store of assumptions.

Blind From Birth

Physical blindness, like Milton's, with a store of past vision, is one thing. Our Gospel today is not about that. Our hero today is a man who has never seen anything, who has never known light. We should meditate on that state, because it is a good picture of humanity blind to God. If you have a teaching rôle, in home or school or anywhere, you will recognise the meaning of this Gospel: *how do you begin?* Teaching music to the tone-deaf, to whom it is all just noise: teaching sympathy to an autistic person, who has never caught anyone's eye or felt anyone else's pain or joy: teaching peace and calm to a paranoid schizophrenic, who lives in a strange world, threatened and haunted: teaching trust to an abused or violated person, who sees every newcomer as a possible aggressor....none of us is perfectly-sighted, and most of us have our senses impaired in one way or another.

A Darkened Humanity

We believe that the end-purpose of human life is the sharing of divine life and joy. This means that a humanity robbed of its hope of God must be radically frustrated. People who try to make sense of life without God must always be left thinking they've missed the point. For what else can fill the gap left by an

absent God? This frustration is all around us, in the helplessness of people who can't find the reason to trust, to search for the truth, to keep their promises, to hold out for justice, simply to do their best. The throwing-away of the possibility of religious faith has left people wounded and disabled, self-condemned to blindness and uncertainty. Whatever wretched dead-end they land in, they still rule out the possibility that faith in God might, after all, be the truth that will make sense of us. It's like a chosen blindness: it's almost like the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Go And Wash Your Eyes

Don't think that Jesus' strange anointing of the blind man's eyes is magic. The word "Christ" means "anointed"; I guess "the Christ" can anoint others. The ointment is blended of Christ, and of the dust of the earth - the element of which we are created in Genesis 2. Here is the theme of the new creation: as the Spirit broods over the waters at the Baptism of Jesus, so the word of Jesus (*Go and wash at Siloam*) resounds over the waters of that God-given water-source in the heart of Jerusalem. There the eyes of the blind are opened. And now the man born blind begins his journey of discovery, his inheritance of a new sense; the gift of sight opens him up to the gift of faith in the Light of the World.

Plain Sailing Then?

Notice, however, that the new sense he has inherited from Jesus will not leave him the same man he was before. He is now singled out from his former friends. They acknowledged him as "the blind man who used to beg". Now that he has become filled with light, he is a source of controversy, and at last he will be expelled from the community of the darkened. The old saying has it: *in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king*. He soon finds that in the kingdom of darkness, the sighted man is driven out. He has come to represent the gift he has received; and he threatens those who will not share in his enlightenment. As we come closer to Holy Week, we should look again at what frightens us about the call of Christ, the call to love the unloved, to break unjust fetters, to denounce the evil which keeps us in the dark. Jesus does not call us, to leave us unchanged.

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